



## Newsletter Spring 2021

[www.rcacoe.org](http://www.rcacoe.org)

Registered Charity No 1172186

### From the Chair



Dear friends,

**A very joyful, peaceful and hopeful Easter to you all.**

***Christ is risen: he is risen indeed!***

And that fundamental reality of our faith must lift our vision and reassure us of God's ever-present loving intentions for our lives here and now, even though we have been going through such a difficult period over this last year. We give thanks for the life-giving hope that has been offered us through vaccination and for the selfless work of all involved in the NHS and the countless others who have gone the extra mile and sustained our daily lives through their work. We have been ministered to; as those who have spent so much of our lives ministering to others, it has been humbling to receive such selfless service ourselves. I for one am very grateful.

### Return to ministry?

Very few of us have been able to offer ministry to any extent over this last year and I know many of you are concerned about how it might be to return to offering your services in the parish and diocese. There are those who are now having to apply or re-apply for Permission to Officiate in the diocese and are concerned about the demands of the Safeguarding requirements and process, especially where they function less frequently. Some feel they can no longer continue. We have raised these concerns nationally with the National Safeguarding Training and Development Team and they have listened and are making adjustments so that there should emerge in the next few months an additional Safeguarding Course that is more suited to those of us who minister occasionally. I quote below from Sheila Clarke, the Manager of the NSTDT:

*'It is recognised that those with Permission to Officiate (PtO) and Readers Emeriti still need to participate in safeguarding learning. It is also recognised that the exercise of PtO or the level of ministry of emeriti readers can vary considerably between different people. For some it will involve a high level of work regularly, for others a very low level of work irregularly. As the main Safeguarding Leadership Pathway is now targeted at those people "who play a lead role in shaping the culture of the Church body concerned" those with PtO and emeriti readers whose role meets this criterion must participate in the main Safeguarding Leadership Pathway. Those with PtO or emeriti readers whose role does not meet this criterion must participate in a bespoke PtO/Readers Emeriti Safeguarding Learning Pathway.*

*'The decision about which Pathway an emeriti reader or someone with PtO should take must be made by the Bishop in consultation with the DSA and/or safeguarding trainer. The local supervisor (incumbent or rural dean) may also be well placed to assist in identifying the level of involvement of an individual in leadership and therefore which Pathway would be most appropriate. For those newly retired, the Pathway individuals take should be decided at the point they start their new role. For existing PtOs and Readers Emeriti, a formal decision based on consideration of a person's role against the above criterion would need to be made within the diocese.'*

*'I hope that you agree that this addresses the concerns you raise but please do come back to me if you feel we need to go further.'*

I hope that this will help to allay anxieties among you, especially those of you who were feeling that now was the time to stop, as what was being asked in terms of Safeguarding Training was too great a burden.

Your ministry is valuable and you are valued. We shall continue to monitor how this all pans out and would hope for some consistency across the dioceses.

### A new editor

This is Mark Rudall's first Newsletter as our new editor. Mark brings a wealth of experience as a former head of a Diocesan Communications Team and I am so glad he agreed to take on this important role. Communication, how we do it, share it and offer it lies at the heart of our faith: *'God spoke these words... The Word was made flesh... In these last days God has spoken to us through a Son...'* So, welcome, Mark!

### A new world?

As the days grow longer and lighter and we begin to re-emerge into something like a normality that will be subtly different, my hope is that we shall find a world that is more generous, more tolerant, more selfless, because of what we have experienced together over this last year or so and that we shall be ready to play our part.

With every blessing,

**+Ian**



**From the editor:** *Welcome to the Spring newsletter, my first since donning the editorial braces, bow-tie and green eyeshade. It's a privilege to serve my colleagues in this way and the idea is to give as many of us as possible a voice - to each other at least. Hopefully we'll reflect something of our shared life as retired but often very useful priests in a Church scene changing rapidly just as it did when we were all at the sharp end.*

*Bishop Ian has introduced me but what he didn't say was that in 2013, the sudden onset of Myasthenia Gravis forced retirement at age 60. However, our excellent NHS caught it early and since 2017 the MG has been mostly in remission, so I'm grateful, once again to be very active as a priest (with PtO) and as a journalist too.*

*Please send your written contributions! In this edition you will find a short essay of mine to maybe lead others into contributing. We may be retired but we're not merely passive observers as the bus of daily ministry accelerates away! The more you send, the better will be our newsletter. It's produced in two formats: a colour edition with pictures for the web and a more compact b/w edition which is printed off and mailed to around 80 recipients not in a position to receive it electronically.*

**Mark Rudall [markrudall@gmail.com]**

## **RETIRED**

Not to worry myself any more  
if I am out of step, fallen behind.  
Let the space probes continue;  
I have a different distance to travel.

Here I can watch the night sky,  
listen to how one grass blade  
grates on another as member  
of a disdained orchestra.

There are no meetings to attend  
now other than those nocturnal  
gatherings, whose luminaries  
fell silent millennia ago.

No longer guilty of wasting  
my time, I take my place  
by a lily-flower, believing  
with Blake that when God comes

he comes sometimes by way  
of the nostril. My failure, perhaps,  
was to have had no sense of smell  
for the holiness suspiring from forked humans.

I count over the hours put by  
for repentance, pulling thought's buildings  
down to make way for the new,  
fooling myself with the assurance

that when he occurs it is as the weather  
of prayer's forecast, never with all  
the unexpectedness of his body's  
lightning, naked upon a cross.

**R.S. Thomas**

## The story of an Easter painting

### Artist and retired priest *Andrew Vessey* shares a personal reflection

I'm going to share a picture with you, one I painted early on in 2020. But I'm taking this opportunity to also think out loud about the whole business of making art happen, viewed through the prism of my life as a priest, who happened to also be an artist. To talk about art is always risky. Finding words to express intuition and processes that for some of us are second-nature, is asking a lot of both writer and reader. So please forgive my attempt to put some of these processes into print.

In many ways creating a picture is about finding resolution. It's more than copying a view or making a smaller version of what already exists. I believe artists are people who need to continue exploring and developing these tensions and challenges. In a way it is a sort of dialogue, with conversations going on between our heads and hearts, while growing more and more aware of where all the inspiration started, be it things seen or heard, felt or read about, dreamed of even, and so on. Being a dialogue and a resolution, these conversations and opportunities make the whole creative activity very similar to that of praying.

Many of you will be aware of the existence of a wonderful retreat movement which was initially called quite simply 'Painting & Prayer'. The two processes dovetail into each other. It's not primarily about the product, such as the prayer or a picture. It's more to do with the art of praying and painting. When I became national Chairman of P&P, back in the early 1990s, we felt it important to broaden our scope. We decided to embrace a wider range of creative pursuits, offering time apart for celebrating and exploring those skills and insights that make up being 'at prayer' and immersed 'in prayer' through the particular creative activity on offer. Back then, we called the new 'baby' 'The Creative Arts Retreat Movement' or CARM. We felt strongly that the principles by which we brought painting and praying together, held good for all sorts of artistic and creative activities.

My own principle creative outlet in retirement is painting. Having trained in Fine Art and taught it for many years before ordination, I now have enormous pleasure in taking it seriously again; having my own lovely studio and the luxury of time to think about what I'm doing. The painting reproduced here, (*unfortunately for those with print editions of this newsletter only in black and white*) was completed shortly after Easter 2020. Its origins go back three



years or more when we learnt we would lose a piece of adjoining wild woodland for housing development in our village. Day after day we have known this wood to change our lives. It has sparked all sorts of connections to the extraordinary capacity of nature. My wife and I have admired the turning year through its subtle changes and been encouraged to take more seriously the need to engage with and help formulate a relevant environmental theology.

-

-----

At one level my painting is a picture of desecration. The woodland was trashed and rolled up, repeating what all too easily goes on in dozens of other places across the length and breadth of our country. Something thought to be expendable becomes sacrificed. When development - which is by no means necessarily a bad thing - also becomes unwarranted and rapacious, it turns into a far more sinister presence. The actual sentence of woodland execution was carried out very close to Holy Week so an extraordinary set of connections and a whole range of prayer-filled experiences was set in progress. Our own pain and the sounds of screaming machinery, the toppling of trees and the grinding of timber being felled was an extraordinary backdrop to the darkest and most emotional of weeks in the Christian Calendar. I quickly realised that the only way I could possibly begin to pray through this situation was to create my own images and capture something of the pain and anger, despair and grief by putting paint on a canvas.

Walking in what had been woodland, albeit a little shabby and unmanaged, on Good Friday and seeing three of the remaining trees silhouetted against the profile of my own house, reinforced those deep connections with Calvary. One's grief for the life of all trees and their ability to harbour mammals and birds, distribute essential bacteria, foster fungi and send messages along their root-systems, creating vital mycorrhizal networks, had been brought even closer to home. Here indeed was a subject that needed to be portrayed vividly enough for the viewer to feel something of my emotions while also capturing the essence of my belief. It is in these ways that art can work as a witness.

But, compelled as I was, to begin conceiving some sort of working order out of the undoubted chaos - what many have since referred to as our own Flanders Field - I was completely unprepared when leaving my garden and returning to the scene of desecration during Easter Week. Walking through the mud and mess, dwarfed by the piles of brash, I spotted a clump of wild primroses and then another, and another, as if nothing was going to suppress these little harbingers of hope.

Those same clumps which had miraculously managed to avoid the bulldozer tracks now sit in our garden. Their tiny yellow flowers, like stars in the dark, had provided us with a message of resurrection. Later in the week our walking brought us further surprises. Hugging the side of the woodland, albeit reduced to a spindly hedge, were several places where beautiful mosses were revealed still clinging to upended and discarded stumps. Brought into focus, we could marvel at their intricacy - tiny cushions of an intense green, clinging on in what was otherwise a thoroughly bleak landscape: pinpricks of life on discarded bark.

Somehow, in the resolution of our grief for what had been destroyed and little stabs of heartfelt joy over what survived, this painting's title could never be in much doubt. I call it '*Easter 2020*'. It stands as a prayer of protest against all those systems which wilfully and thoughtlessly destroy our natural world, not just woods and forests but whole systems of life itself.

I think of it as a lament-in-paint! But it is also prayer-of-thanksgiving for the preservation of life, sometimes against all odds. The gift of hope and the way in which thoughts and ideas, the stuff of both art and prayer, can spawn from the inside of our souls and travel back and forth to our Creator Spirit remains an extraordinary marvel.

In that way, my painting is not about a specific view or even a particular disaster. Rather I trust you can see it as an amalgamation of connections and convictions. It contains pleas and thanksgivings and, hopefully, works as some sort of resolution. It's a painting that came together, like so much prayer, on behalf of others or a cause, while yet touching wounds within ourself. It can only ever be thought of as complete because in the long process of putting it together I too have been made a little bit more complete.

Praying with a paint brush. Out of nothing comes something that might be more like a voice, something that hasn't existed before but which nevertheless can find space in my life to breathe over me and enable my fulfilment.



## **Whither worship? *Chris Mitchell***

As I write this, we are in Lockdown three, and although public worship is permitted, most churches and cathedrals have wisely decided to pause worship within their buildings.

We continue to have a wide variety of Zoom or streamed services to choose from, and are immensely grateful for their existence, and for the work and creativity that go into their production. Most of us, though, will be heartily thankful for the return of worship 'in person', when that comes. No doubt digital services have been a means of outreach to many unchurched people, and some of these services should continue. But there is nevertheless an element of 'viewing' rather than 'worshipping' in these services, and a lack of the physicality that marks attendance together in a building.

The pause in physical worship which the pandemic has dictated should perhaps make us ponder the nature of worship when we return. In recent years there has been a tendency for parish churches to offer a wide choice of types of service, enabling us each to attend the service we prefer. On the face of it this seems laudable, but with this 'supermarket' style are we not simply following the ways of the world, and elevating individual choice over community?

Some of the recent 'Fresh Expressions' congregations are indeed based on the assumption that we relate to each other through 'interest groups' rather than geographical communities. This may often be so, but as the Church should we not be flying the flag for geographical congregations of varied ages, backgrounds and interests to worship together, physically in a building? Of course, few parish churches really encompass all types of people, but that doesn't mean we should stop trying.

Maybe we need to return to the Parish Communion Movement, which took root in the 1920s and 30s, and flourished in the early post-war decades. This movement proclaimed that the Church's central Sunday service should be a simple Eucharist with hymns and brief sermon, suitable for all ages to gather together as the Body of Christ. At first this Movement was strongly counter cultural, with most churchgoers used to Mattins, or at the more exotic locations, High Mass. One peer declared in the House of Lords that 'These parsons are Communion mad!' - yet, slowly, the Movement progressed, as people realised that (a) Jesus calls us to 'do this in remembrance of me', and (b) it was Biblically correct for the whole Body to meet together. Regular attendance at the Parish Communion was promoted - 'the Lord's Own Service on the Lord's Own Day', and one Newcastle vicar used to say 'you should be there every week, wet or fine, alive or dead!'

Of course, we live in very different circumstances today, and no one would advocate that we unthinkingly try to mimic the 1950s. Certainly, there must be other services as well as the Eucharist, and we must also be creative and flexible in our Eucharistic services. Often Eucharists could be shorter: there is no need for every service to last an hour or more, and with today's short attention spans, 40 or 45 minutes is quite long enough for a meaningful service with two or three hymns and a short sermon. Common Worship, and the ASB before it, provide a wide selection of possible items, but many are optional, and we don't need to include them all on every occasion! We must continue to adapt and evolve, but let us not abandon the Parish Communion principle whilst doing so.

Let us hold fast to the Eucharist as the core of our worship, doing as Christ commanded, and not letting down those who fought hard in the last century for its central place, otherwise we are in danger of letting worship wither.



## **Peace, tranquillity, fresh air and the other side of the coin *Mark Rudall***

A surprising number of retired Anglican clergy own narrow boats, or if they don't actually have their own, they hire regularly so that they can explore Britain's 2000 miles or so of navigable waterways. They criss-cross wonderful countryside, and those familiar chocolate-box scenarios of sun-bathed narrowboats meandering along tranquil canals have huge allure.

Just as some people might walk into old churches for a little relief from the rough and tumble of their lives, others will seek a spot of tranquillity along the towpaths. There they will find that the proximity of relatively still water, the sounds and sights of wildlife and the constantly changing colours of the seasons will calm a troubled mind and charge the psychological batteries.

But there is another side to this coin, because the allure of the waterways can lead to the decision to buy a boat and become a continuous cruiser, which sounds a great choice when physical and mental health is robust and relationships are working well. But life 'happens' and dreams can suddenly shatter, leaving boaters in need of support.

At the same time people sometimes take to life afloat as a means of escape having taken a knock and that means they're vulnerable from the start, because bucolic summers have a way of turning into chilly winters...

'Those are the reasons why there are now around 100 Waterways Chaplains walking towpaths or cruising the system as liveboards,' says Senior Chaplain the **Revd Mark Chester**.



'Chaplains have a vital role to play in the armed forces, in hospitals, prisons and many other settings, and the impetus to introduce practically-minded volunteer Waterways Chaplains came from a growing awareness that they could be equally useful 'on the cut' and indeed wherever there is inland navigation. Human situations can be found within the steel walls of a narrowboat that are every bit as complex as those encountered in housing estates or tower blocks.

'It's hard to nail precise numbers, but probably around 2m people live on, or are closely involved with our waterways. Our growing band of easily identifiable Chaplains are clued up to provide local information and to advise where practical help like food banks and medical help can be found. They are there to provide support for those for whom the peaceful water-borne idyll has gone pear-shaped for whatever reason, and the pastoral care they are providing particularly on crowded sections of waterway is making an impact and is taken very seriously by the Canal & River Trust and the Environment Agency who administer most of our waterways.'

Waterways Chaplaincy is an excellent channel for the pastoral gifts of reasonably fit, retired clergy. Many Chaplains operate on their own but others enjoy operating as couples in ways which were not possible in parish ministry. Chaplains commit to walking a mile of towpath a week, either close to where they live or wherever they happen to be. The idea is to observe what's going on and to 'engage' the people they meet, as well as to pray for people and situations.

Chaplains are expected to be 'practically proactive and spiritually reactive' in the situations they encounter and training sessions address this. Even with previous heavy involvement with the waterways it is great to have the insights of professionals into lock usage, for example, and other matters linked to waterways, at the same time being brought alongside others sharing his passion for ministry, the waterways and people. Could this be something for you?

**More information about Waterways Chaplaincy can be found by Googling up Waterways Chaplaincy but having served as a Chaplain for a number of years I'm happy if you email me for a chat. [markrudall@gmail.com]**





Lockdown was no reason to let standards slip

Recently-retired priest/cartoonist **Ron Wood** has been delighting many over the years with his sideways looks at the Church. Lockdown has given him a lot to think about and here are just two of his topical reflections - these both highlighting sartorial issues for clergy during this time of crisis...



I an used his laptop to keep the prayer group together



**Points of order...** These items of information will have appeared in diocesan circulars that not all of us necessarily absorb, so Council members felt it might be useful for them to be highlighted in this newsletter:

**Remember Marriage Registers? Be aware that changes come into force this year**

This is not the vehicle to lay out detailed implications of new legislation but it might be helpful for those members who handle marriages and marriage blessings in local churches to be reminded that The Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc.) Act 2019 successfully completed its passage through Parliament and gained Royal Assent on 26 March 2019.

The Act provides for the modernisation of marriage registration for the first time since 1837, by introducing a marriage schedule system and registration in an electronic register. The process has been designed to move away from the current paper register and introduce a more secure system for keeping marriage records. Those framing it have aimed for a system both more efficient and simpler to administer and amend, if necessary, in the future.

The regulations making the required amendments to the Marriage Act 1949 are expected to come into force on 4 May 2021 and training materials for those who need them will be made available.

The reading of Banns, the correct ink for the register and so on all remain, but what will change is a requirement to create a marriage document or obtain the marriage schedule prior to the date of marriage. Clergy will no longer complete the formal register for the marriages they solemnize (although a register will still be kept for their church records). Clergy will no longer issue the legal marriage certificates and the completed marriage document or marriage schedule must be returned to the register office for the registration to take place in the electronic marriage register before a certificate can be issued. There will no longer be a requirement for quarterly returns for marriages

taking place in the building and neither will clergy be responsible for corrections in marriage registers. After the changes are introduced, all corrections to marriage entries will be carried out by the registration officers or the General Registry Office. The electronic register will also allow for the names of parents of the couple (mother / father / parent) to be included in the marriage entry instead of only fathers' names as is currently the case.

## **The New National Register of Clergy**

RCA Council member, the Revd David Lewis, highlights that all the Church of England's 20,000 active clergy – those who hold a licence or Permission to Officiate (PtO) – are currently being asked to confirm that information held about them by National Church Institutions (NCIs) and dioceses is accurate for when a new National Register of Clergy goes live in May.

Currently PtO and licence details are held in each diocese but not published nationally. The National Register is being introduced to strengthen safeguarding in the Church and was a recommendation in the 2017 Gibb Review which looked into the Church's handling of allegations against the late Bishop Peter Ball. The NCIs, and representatives from each diocese, have worked together on the project and the relevant regulation covering the information that will be published was passed at General Synod in November 2020. All active clergy will now be included by law and should be contacted individually to ask them to confirm their details.

The new Register will show an individual's title and name, how they are engaged with the Church of England (current post/licence) and the diocese, area or benefice to which they are licensed. This information will be publicly available on the Church of England website. The Register can be searched to verify whether someone has PtO or licence to hold office, in much the same way as other professions hold national lists. At the time of launch the Register will include those who are ordained, expanding to include lay ministry in due course. The Register will not include contact, biographical or historical information.

David Lewis advises that those who might wish to check that their details are correctly registered should contact: [psproject@churchofengland.org](mailto:psproject@churchofengland.org)



## **Newly retired? *Tony Whatmough* retired in 2020 and shares his thoughts on facing the other direction in church**

As I write this, I've been retired now for just six weeks: what have I learnt during this time?

Well one thing has certainly been the importance of social interaction in church. With Lockdown, that has not been possible. We have found a church which suits us, but because there is no social interaction after the services, no refreshments etc., it has been difficult to get to know people. The other thing is that I'm having to learn to worship again – and maybe I need to explain what I mean.

Well, as a priest of course, I've conducted a lot of worship, and doing this has involved multitasking. It's not just a matter of saying the right words in the right order (qv) but making sure that everything is happening as it should.

If I'm not preaching, has the preacher arrived? (On more than one occasion I've had to step in because they've forgotten, and I always made sure I had an outline in my head!) Is the intercessor there? Is there someone on the sick list, who has suddenly appeared in church? Are the readers in place, and are they reading the set readings? Again, on quite a few occasions people have delivered the wrong reading and I've had to improvise the sermon around what has been read!

But there are other things as well. I might be conducting the service, and saying internally 'Oh there's Mrs so and so, I must have a word with her afterwards'. Or 'Mr. X has turned up; he's not been here for a while' and so on.

All these things are going through my head as I'm leading worship, and when attending church on holiday, my wife has often said to me 'This is not your church. If things go wrong it's not your responsibility!'

Her observation has now become my new normal, and it takes practice.

In all my time as a parish priest, I've always tried to practise Lectio Divina. This means as I'm saying the words of the service, to try and observe the true meaning of the passages, to notice what they are saying and to pay full attention. And as I do that, I do notice what incredible words they are. These are indeed the words of eternal life. (John 6:68) and Lectio Divina helps me to recognise this.

In retirement, I find that I can give myself more fully to this and gradually I'm turning off 'the leading worship switch' and learning to give myself completely to being a worshipper again.

It will take practice of course, but I hope I'm getting there!



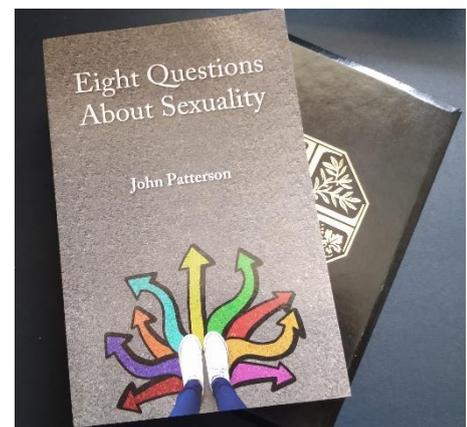
## Helping enquirers to get to grips with identity politics and the Church

### **Eight Questions About Sexuality** John Patterson

Grosvenor House Publishing ISBN 978-1-83975-156-1

RCA member **John Patterson** has produced a compact independent 44pp guide to help enquirers through the minefield of identity politics. With a strongly Biblical focus he provides a useful glossary of terms used, before launching into the first of his eight questions: 'Why does the Church make such a fuss about sex?'

Seeking to present something accessible and pastorally aware, John's questions come out of his awareness of what he calls the 'avalanche of social change' over the last 20 years following the Civil Partnerships and Gender Recognition Acts of 2004 followed in 2014 by the Marriage (same sex couples) Act. He comments: '...standing in front of the avalanche can feel like a lonely place to be' and closes by highlighting that while it can sound both tolerant and loving to 'go with the flow', human flourishing is God's plan for his world, and it comes on his terms, not ours.'



John's work is published just as the Church of England's 'Living in Love and Faith' (LLF) is being presented through diocesan Zoom study days around the country. LLF is a comprehensive study and teaching resource, the culmination of what is thought to be the largest research and consultation project into identity and sexuality ever carried out.

It was commissioned in the wake of a General Synod debate rejecting the House of Bishops' 2017 endorsement of Canon B30: *'the Church of England affirms, according to our Lord's teaching, that marriage is a union permanent and life-long, of one man with one woman...'*

Those pushing for change argued that it didn't go far enough; while traditionalists argued that it opened the door too widely in its 'welcoming tone' towards Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transsexual (LGBT) people.

While the Church in every century is obliged to struggle with ethical and moral subjects many people in the pews might have difficulty understanding, accessible resources will always be needed to unpack complex issues. They don't come much more complex than those relating to human sexuality, gender reassignment, identity politics and the role of the Church. [MR]



## **Christopher Wardale (Diocese of Newcastle) has been exploring the corners of his bookshelves:**

The exploration of my shelves, cupboards and other book storage places continues and I am still discovering books worth reading. I share another couple with you.

### **The Poppy      Nicholas J Saunders      One World      2013      ISBN 978-85168- 705 – 3**

This is a curious book and as you read it you begin to feel like Alice remarking how Wonderland gets ‘curiouser and curiouser’. Our main experience of the poppy as an image comes in late October and the first half of November in the preparation for, and the enactment of, Remembrance-tide, the annual reminder of two World Wars and the death, in many times and places, of armed service personnel.

Nicholas Saunders begins where you expect him to begin, in ‘Flanders Fields’ - where the ever-sprouting red poppy in the midst of the killing became the inspiration for John McCrae’s deeply moving poem. But you begin to discover that the poppy has a longer ‘history’. It is the tell-tale sign of human cultivation of the land, of the ravages of war, of the desire to escape this world through opium or other poppy based drugs. From the ancient Egyptian fights over prized potions to the addicts of the American Civil War, to the British involvement in the Opium Wars in China and the still ongoing tribal narcotics trade in Afghanistan we find this flower - the seemingly ever-present poppy.

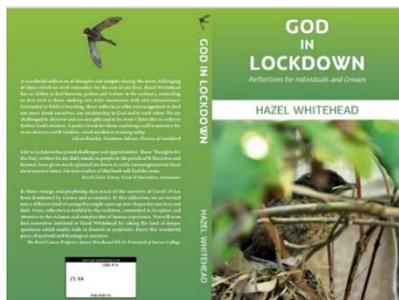
It would be too easy to think that the poppy is just a symbol of death and violence, or an escape from reality. Saunders leads us through all that but comes to show us that even in our most familiar image of the ‘Flanders Fields’ the poppy can be seen as an image of Resurrection. Despite it all, life goes on and life is renewed. This is a curious book – do not be afraid to be curious enough to go and find it. As I write it is available on eBay.

### **The Undiscovered Country      Carl Watkins      The Bodley Head      2013      ISBN 9781847921406**

This book is subtitled ‘Journeys among the Dead’. All of us in our ministries will have had to take a great many people through such journeys as we prepare them for death and their loved ones for a funeral. Carl Watkins asks questions such as ‘though we know what happens to the body after death, what happens to the soul?’ The answer to that may have puzzled all of us but such a question, he reckons, has shaped centuries of tradition, folklore and religious belief. Carl takes us on a journey in search of ancient customs, local characters and compelling tales that try to shine light into the darkness that surrounds all questions about how people, over the centuries, have come to terms with our ‘ultimate fate’. From the phantom drummer of Tedworth (whose existence, or otherwise, embroiled some of the greatest minds of the C17th), to a C19th Druid in Wales who completely changed the national view of cremation, Carl Watkins takes us on an enthralling journey into Britain’s past. Impeccably researched and elegantly written this is a book I found it hard put down, and that doesn’t happen very often. It has been for me one the best books of 2020. I found it in a remainder bookshop but I see it is also available on eBay.



## **God in Lockdown      A timely resource from Hazel Whitehead**



RCA Member, **Canon Dr Hazel Whitehead** has been busy in Lockdown and has published, ‘God in Lockdown’ a helpful collection of reflections designed for individuals and groups. Although prepared primarily with the existing world situation to the fore she found too that when Lent was approaching the book came into its own, with home groups using it in virtual meetings and giving positive feedback:

*‘They are all texting each other discussing which church (from Revelation 2 – 3) they would like to belong to...’*

And from an atheist friend: 'I don't get all the references and I don't believe anything much but I've found myself walking along the beach wondering...'

Says Hazel: 'I was invited to attend one group on Zoom and answer questions – and indeed am very happy to do that for anybody else.'

'God in Lockdown' also makes an ideal adult baptism, confirmation or ordination present – and the hope is that we will soon be doing such things again soon. The book can be ordered direct from <https://www.ypdbooks.com/non-fiction/2197-god-in-lockdown-reflections-for-individuals-and-group-YPD02468.html> for 5.99 plus p&p or direct from the author: [hazelwhitehead54@gmail.com](mailto:hazelwhitehead54@gmail.com) [01489 895327]



**Mike Parsons has also been digging into important current reflections on the Pandemic**

**God and the Pandemic**, Tom Wright, 76pp, SPCK, ISBN 978-0-281-08511-8 £2.99

**Where is God in a Coronavirus World?** John C Lennox, 64pp, The Good Book Company, ISBN 978-1-784-98569-1 £7.99

Wright's book is *not* a call to repentance for the sins of either ourselves or of society, nor is it particularly a treatise on 'Why does God allow bad things to happen' (see the Lennox book for that), although it does get more than a passing mention.

It is pre-eminently an exposition of what the Bible has to say to guide us in difficult situations and encourages us to look forward and not back. It is a slim book, written in Tom Wright's eminently readable style: think of a single sitting to read it.

He disposes, in a number of side-swipes, of Christian responses that he thinks are plain wrong and unbiblical. As befits a scholar who is steeped in the philosophy of the NT era, in which St Paul was raised and trained, he gives us some quick pen portraits of possible approaches that would have been familiar in the ancient world. In Wright's hands, these turn out to be remarkably relevant today.

The Stoics, for whom everything is programmed to be the way it is: don't try to change things, just accept it. 'Shit happens', as the writing on the Oxford wall said. If the bullet has your name on it, so be it. 'There is nothing we can do about it; it must be God's will'. The Epicureans were a more cheerful lot: for them it was all random anyway, the best you could do was spot the trends and fit in as you are best able: 'enjoy yourself if you can'.

Wright comments that this is the modern West. 'Stuff happens, but we want to scramble for comfort, so settle down, self-isolate, watch plenty of Netflix. This too will pass'. Then we have the Platonists. We are living in a shadow world of images of reality that are out of our immediate reach while being destined for the better place where all is real. A not unattractive position for a lot of Christians, 'this world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through'. We are bound for heaven, but in the meantime, we will make the best of a bad job.

Wright points out that the best reply to the preacher who sees this pandemic as a call to repentance, is to say, 'Go and read Job'. The whole point of Job is that *he did not need to repent* (but his friends did).

The theme running through this little book is that the Christian response is not best expressed by asking 'Why?', but by recognising that Jesus came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God; and so, the best question to ask is 'What?'. What should we do? The Christian response throughout two millennia has always been to respond to need. Education, medicine, social care all offered freely, and in the pandemic the whole UK society has responded to calls for help: shopping for the shielding, meals for the homeless, NHS volunteers, retired nurses and doctors offering help.

The Christian will probably want a Christian perspective and the question 'Where is God in all this' will be in many minds and needs vocalising by those in leadership and teaching roles. Tom Wright will help you do that in a

thoroughly Biblical way. There are those who would have us see the pandemic as God's judgement on us, which he will have none of.

There are sections on reading the Old Testament, Jesus and the gospels, and then reading the New Testament before launching into the largest section on 'Where do we go from here'. As we emerge from the third lockdown and churches start to work out what comes next, this section is well worth reading. It is aimed squarely at the Christian who wants a Biblical (and radical) response for Christian living and witness.

Now: if you want more on the science or the philosophy, then read both Wright's book and the other title I am commending. John Lennox is an Oxford mathematician and an ethicist who has written widely in the science and religion field, particularly in apologetics. 'Where is God in a Coronavirus World?' is Lennox's attempt at a conversation in a coffee shop to the question as posed. Lennox's book has endnotes, by the way - so you can follow up material. Wright mainly refers to his own works in the text.

This and the Wright book are quite different in tone, with Lennox leaning more towards the person who wants to ask philosophical questions about God, evil and the pandemic. The Wright book assumes a Bible-focused Christian readership and is excellent for that. Lennox's book would suit the more sceptical believer, but they both end up in the same place, with the supremacy of Christ on the cross as a model for life in pandemic times.

Lennox draws out the distinction between moral and natural evil, using what John Polkinghorne terms the 'Free Process Defence', although this is not a term he uses. He considers how plausible is the atheistic world view and finds it wanting as providing no answers other than stoic acceptance (see Wright above). He has a jab at the lack of consistency of those who would say that all faith-based claims are irrelevant: he has had at least two face-to-face dialogues with Richard Dawkins on this, and it shows. You will get a defence of viruses here as essential to life on earth and our water supply, just as volcanoes and earthquakes are needed to renew the earth's resources and provide continents and the earth's magnetic field.

Interestingly, however, Lennox is more pietistic than Wright in his conclusions for living with the pandemic, but suggests similar paths forward: live as normally as possible, seek for the health of the city, show the evidence of Christian love.

They both illustrate clearly the conclusion of the Presbyterian theologian of the early twentieth century, PT Forsyth, who in considering a theological response to the great evils of WW1, concluded, 'We do not see the answer; we trust the Answerer, and measure by Him'.



## **When things just don't make sense: cognitive dissonance and the Church**

**Mark Rudall flies an editorial kite - sharing a bit of personal topical angst to see what others might have to say:**

I start each day by reading the news on the web because I want my prayer and reflection to be reasonably well informed. But the concept of 'dissonance' has figured heavily in my thinking of late for a variety of reasons.

Great word isn't it? If I say from the pulpit 'As a Christian I believe it's quite wrong to go and rob a bank', and then next week head off to the local HSBC and hold it up at gunpoint, if members of my congregation have their brains switched on, they will experience 'cognitive dissonance'. Involvement in Diocesan communications afforded many examples of congregations having to handle this in the wake of their clergy or other respected figure rather publicly straying from the strait and narrow. What was proclaimed and what was actually lived didn't quite add up.

Cognitive dissonance: Christianity and the Church are full of it, for what we say so often doesn't seem to add up. But of course, there were many aspects of the life of Jesus that would have caused followers to step back and take a

deep breath. He talked, touched and ate with traditionally outcast people, and indeed chose what looked like completely unsuitable people to establish what became the Church. Throughout history, although the Bible is reasonably clear about what constitutes appropriate behaviour for Christians, we have consistently fallen short. All very Romans 3.23.

A priest colleague of mine highlighted for me that from its earliest days the Church lived with a hefty elephant lumbering about in its collective room in that Christ's return, clearly expected imminently by St Paul and all first century believers, didn't appear to be happening. That didn't stop the Church embarking quickly on the process of 'early Catholicism'. Indeed, it possibly encouraged adoption of ideas about sophisticated buildings in which to worship, about priestly dignity, particular dress for those same clergy and, of course, a rigid structural hierarchy. We quietly drifted away from the simplicity of the itinerant teacher of Galilee.

Occasional uprisings ranging from massive movements like the Reformation to the occasional brouhaha about vestments, have punctuated church history while the last thirty years has seen the role of women and sexual identity as the major topics driving wedges of opinion into the Church with all the ferocity that the abolition of slavery generated in the 19th century. At a political level the Church and ordinary people were apparently untroubled by that particular enormous 'dissonance' alongside their confident white supremacy, the disenfranchisement of women, child labour, inhuman judicial systems and the Poor Law, not to mention exploitation of vulnerable people and nations.

Of course, we have to look at not just the ideas that create dissonance, but the people involved. Just who it is that Christians are prepared to lionise is always worth exploring and the rise of demagogues throughout political history has seen plenty of Christian support. 17th century England had John Pym a Puritan parliamentarian and virulent critic of Charles 1<sup>st</sup> who paved the way for Cromwell and the English Civil War. Twentieth century Europe resonated to the insistent drumbeat of one demagogue after another from the flagrantly disgusting Gabriele d'Annunzio, the Italian poet and self-publicist who invented Fascism in time for Mussolini, through to Germany's Fuhrer who was able to persuade Lutherans to hang swastika banners in places of worship. In the 21st century we saw an openly corrupt 45th President of the USA shouldered into the White House by gun-toting fundamentalists who could be described as Christian nationalists. The dissonances could hardly be written in larger letters...

As a preacher, and having some background in human psychology I am convinced that Christianity can still triumph in this terribly faulty world. At the same time, I have often been tempted to hang up my stole on the grounds that anything I have ever prepared at my desk and proclaimed from a pulpit was possibly a waste of breath. The intention is always to provide what might be called 'a takeaway' from any homiletic endeavour, but frankly, in those bleaker, cynical, moments I've wondered if my congregations might have been happier if I'd read them an article from 'Hello!' magazine! Yet, astonishingly, once in a very blue moon, a word comes back that someone was indeed moved on in the faith or in their life.

All who have the temerity to preach hold in high priority the business of getting a message across successfully, bearing in mind the comments made in Isaiah 6 about the difficulty of getting anyone to actually listen and act on what they have heard. Isaiah 6 looms large as I observe the ascendancy of conspiracy theories over honest journalism. I recently spent time gently disabusing a member of a local parish church congregation of the idea that the spreading contrails of high flying aircraft are not incontrovertible evidence that our population is being 'sown' by the CIA with subtly mind-changing chemicals... It took a while, because it had to be done in such a way that he would not feel I was patronising him.

Of course, it's not just the Christian faith that throws up massive dissonances. Islam and other faiths do so too, and more so wherever forms of 'fundamentalism' emerge - witness the emergence of the Taliban and ISIS - and it's there in the western secular world as well where morality has lost its datum lines and compass.

Things that raise cognitive dissonance, or would if people thought about them, are all around us. Furthermore, the web is a powerful helper to those who wish to rationalise away the blaring inconsistencies that come at them from all directions and which are particularly jarring at the moment.

Many might argue that there can be no real objectivity about what is right and what is wrong in politics, in religion and in personal decision making. But what we can't deny is that a golden thread of goodness and awareness of 'a better way' has continued to run through the Christian tradition for two millennia, often through the bravery of individuals like some of the ancient fathers and other more recent figures like Wycliffe, Wilberforce or Bonhoeffer.

On one of my bookshelves sits an aluminium canal lock windlass, given to me when I became a Waterways Chaplain. On it is stamped my name and the words of Micah 6.8: 'What does the Lord require of me? To do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God.'

As it stands that is fair enough, but the New Testament emphasis builds on that foundation and stresses that the Kingdom of God is to be built at an all-inclusive world level rather than at a sharply ring-fenced racial and national level. Scripture acknowledges that there is a powerful tendency in humankind to drift away from the objective rights and wrongs of God, and so the roots of the newly-defined Kingdom lie in faith, forgiveness and grace rather than in scoring heavenly house points by keeping the rule of law to the letter.

The question is, 'can that message still grip people in our 'post truth' society filled as it is with dissonances at every level?'. I for one am naïve enough to think it can and was encouraged to read very recently about an American non-denominational preacher from Virginia. Distressed at the pervading conflation of nationalism with conservative Christian faith, he recently brought his family to the UK to study theology here. His hermeneutic philosophy, he explains, is that he needs to be able to introduce what he calls 'a pebble in the shoe' for his listeners. The 'pebble' will make its presence felt over time and force them to sit down, take the metaphorical shoe off and, hopefully, start thinking. It's a neat illustration but it sounds like a tough call.

### **The secretary writes**

I hope by now that you will have noticed changes in the newsletter layout by the time you read this, far more professional than I could turn out, all thanks to Mark our new editor. Whilst on the subject of the newsletter it would be very helpful if members could keep me updated on changes to their address and email in good time, quite a number of the Christmas issue bounced back from mailboxes that were full or where the recipient was not known. If you have missed a newsletter in the past you can catch up via our website [www.rcacoe.org](http://www.rcacoe.org) where you can peruse past newsletters for the last 5 years as lockdown reading.

### **Meetings in 2021**

Council met in early March and decided to hold the two provincial meetings again in the latter part of the year. The Archbishop of York has kindly offered to host the northern meeting at Bishopthorpe again and details for joining this will be in the next newsletter, the date is 30<sup>th</sup> September so book it your diary now, maximum number will again be 55.

The southern meeting is more of a problem since venues in London we have approached so far seem to want commercial rents for the day in the area of £750 plus VAT and upwards without catering. Far more than we can afford as an organisation. So I would be grateful to know of venues in inner London which have a capacity for meeting, and worship which can provide accommodation for up to 50 from 10am to 3.30pm on a weekday in September or October. Preferably with easy tube or railway station access. We would be willing to pay a reasonable charge for our use, if you know of anywhere suitable would you please let me inform me of contact details. If we fail to find anywhere in London we may have to look towards, Oxford and the Midlands which may make travel more of a problem for far-flung members in Devon and Cornwall and Kent and East Anglia. Again I would hope to have further details for this meeting in the next newsletter.

### **Pensions Board Update**

This is attached to the e-mail with this newsletter, please do read it there is an important mention in it of the underpayment of pension to married women in past years and the need to make claims for it. We meet with the Pensions Board twice a year and are always willing to get in touch with them during the year about matters of concern to our members, if you let us know. The Board is making changes to its governance this year including the

ability to have retired clergy representation elected to the Board. If you know of anyone with actuarial skills from past employment who might qualify do encourage them to go forward, the election is in June.

### **Representation on Deanery and Diocesan Synods**

Sometimes members contact me about this when they meet with seeming brick walls in deaneries with regard to this. The Church Representation Rules clearly state that where there are ten retired clergy with PTO in a deanery they are entitled to elect one of their number to the Deanery Synod, if twenty then two, etc. The person(s) elected can also represent the House of Clergy on the Diocesan Synod if elected by that House. I have been told of area deans and synod secretaries who profess no knowledge of this provision which has existed for some years, but contact with the relevant Diocesan Secretary should resolve the matter. I discovered last Saturday at our Diocesan Synod in Sheffield that so far 6 retired clergy had given up PTO because of the new Leadership safeguarding course – if you are confronted with this we can give you advice as to how to respond to some of the questions in the course.

### **Ministry Register**

This has recently been set up and is now live. Some members with PTO may not have received communications about it if they do not receive Pensions Board pensions. Registrations require a person number, details of how to obtain this are on the Church of England website. The registration site requires the applicant to have an e-mail address, which may rule out some of our members.

If Council felt that the information for this had been insufficient both from the centre and dioceses. Some clergy with armed forces pensions rather than church ones had not been notified. The register is now active and each person on it requires a person number to register. Unfortunately, the registration site requires the applicant to have an e-mail address, which may rule out a considerable number of our members.

### **Fees**

Were discussed at the last council meeting arising from contact made by some members who were experiencing difficulty in obtaining payments. It is clear that there is **no entitlement** to a fee for retired clergy taking services or occasional offices. In recent years there were in many dioceses policies which enabled retired clergy to receive a fee with the consent of the DBF for that diocese. This was often a split of the fee of between 60-80% of the fee to the clergy person and the rest to the DBF. As a result of financial constraints this tradition seems to be breaking down with a wide range of arrangements by dioceses, otherwise known as a postcode lottery. As a result our Vice-Chairman is writing to the Ministry Division in the hope that some clearer guidance can emerge. We note that some retired clergy have in the past relied on fee income to supplement pension, especially where they have not been receiving a full pension. This may not be possible in future.

### **Hard copies of this newsletter**

We can send these out by mail to those who need to receive it in that format. About 75 of each edition are printed and distributed freely, but at a cost of about £2 each to the organisation. If you know of members who are missing out on this mode of delivery please encourage them to write to me requesting a postal copy.

Items for the next newsletter should be sent to Mark Rudall at [markrudall@gmail.com](mailto:markrudall@gmail.com) or 108 Prospect Road, Farnborough GU14 8NS, by the end of June

**Please note that views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and should not be understood as in any way reflecting the position of RCACoE**

## Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England – [www.rcacoe.org](http://www.rcacoe.org)

President: Rt Revd. Andrew watson, Bishop of Guildford

Chairman: Rt. Revd. Ian Brackley, 1 Bepton Down, Petersfield GU31 4PR [ijbrackley@gmail.com](mailto:ijbrackley@gmail.com)

Secretary and Treasurer: Revd. Malcolm Liles, 473 City Road, Sheffield S2 1 GF [secretary@rcacoe.org](mailto:secretary@rcacoe.org)  
[01144537964/07702203273](tel:01144537964/07702203273)

